

# 1

## Making the Connection

### → Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with an overview of the local improvement planning process implemented in Missouri and how it relates to the provisions of IDEA 2004.

### → Outcomes

- Participants will understand the levels of accountability for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004.
- Participants will understand the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) requirements.
- Participants will be able to identify the specific components of the Missouri Improvement Plan

## Content Summary

### Levels of Accountability

There are three levels of accountability required to ensure children and youth with disabilities are receiving their entitlements provided by IDEA 2004.

The first level is the role of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), which is a division of the U.S. Department of Education. OSEP is responsible for developing policies and procedures to ensure that States are implementing federal laws as written.

The second level of accountability is the State's role. A growing emphasis on the performance of students with disabilities by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has made it necessary for States to "have in place a performance plan that evaluates the State's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of Part B of IDEA and describe how the State will improve such implementation" (NCLB, 2001). The State Performance Plan (SPP) is a six year plan that provides for rigorous and measurable

targets for each year from 2005 to 2011. The targets can be read in complete detail in the resources section of this manual. IDEA 2004 requires States to report to OSEP through an Annual Performance Report (APR). In the same way that OSEP monitors States, States are responsible for monitoring LEAs.

The third level of accountability is at the local level. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) make decisions about how students with disabilities' needs are met. These decisions carry out federal and State policies and affect students with disabilities' performance on State level assessments, such as the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) and the Missouri Assessment Program- Alternate (MAP-A). The performance results at the local level generate the data the States analyze to determine if the SPP targets are being met and whether Districts should receive assistance from the Division of Special Education to improve students' performance.

Before SPP targets were implemented, issues such as graduation rates, dropout rates, and transition were a concern for special educators. But, now under IDEA 2004, accountability for results is explicit and interdependent. States must report progress on meeting targets to the federal level and LEAs must report progress on meeting targets to the States. Both state and local data are also publicly reported, which increases accountability at all levels.

## **Improvement Planning**

The Improvement planning process was developed as a way to assist Districts that were not meeting State Performance Plan (SPP) Targets. The Improvement planning process can be used by Districts to apply for funding, as part of the monitoring process, as a voluntary self-assessment or as some combination of the three.

The Improvement Planning process includes several steps. The first step is to complete a data-based needs assessment. While completing the needs assessment, participants must identify areas that need improvement by analyzing data, develop a hypothesis about the root causes for the area in need of improvement, and lastly, prioritize the District's needs based upon the hypothesized root causes. Districts must include the use of a stakeholder group that is representative of the school

District and the community. The stakeholder group should include general and regular educators, administration, community members, and parents.

Once a thorough needs assessment has been conducted, the second step is to determine what objectives would be important for the District to address based upon the identified needs. Objectives are written that are measurable and aligned with SPP indicators that are not met by the District. Participants must give careful consideration to how progress toward reaching the objectives will be monitored, and data must be collected and reviewed to assess this progress.

After the objectives are written, strategies are chosen to meet the objectives as written. The strategies selected must be research or evidence-based based and they must be appropriate to use with the types of students in the District and the problems being addressed. After strategies are chosen, impact measures must be put in place to evaluate if the strategies are resulting in improved outcomes and if the strategy is being implemented with fidelity. Along the way, the data collected should be analyzed to determine whether or not the strategy is improving student learning or whether changes should be made to the strategy implementation.

Next, if the Improvement Plan serves as a grant application, participants must identify resources and budget needs for the implementation of the strategies. A thorough idea of the costs and resources needed to fully implement the strategies with fidelity must be provided. This portion of the plan is not required for Districts using the planning process only as their self-assessment.